

Why I am not Jack of All Trades

When I have some sort of machine or software I usually want it to efficiently perform the single function for which it was designed.

Unless being a Jack of All Trades is what the machine is designed to do.

My desktop computer is that kind of thing.

My desktop computer does a little bit of everything. That's fine. I like it that way.

When a human being does a lot of different things we get accused of being Jack of All Trades and Master of None.

I am not Jack of All Trades.

I'm a conceptual artist.

The concept comes first.

Then I decide which medium or format suits the concept.

Some ideas come into my head and are very visual. They need to be a drawing or a painting or a video. Is it a frozen captured moment in time? Or a sequence of moments? Painting? Or video?

Some ideas are very clearly about the words and the sentences. Story? Poem? Essay?

I am not Jack of All Trades because I am not running around all of the mediums and genres trying to do a little bit of each one. That would be silly and dissatisfying.

I am not Jack of All Trades because I stick with the same thing all the time and that one same thing is the concept.

It begins as an idea and rapidly turns into a concept. The idea is something like "people standing still". The concept is when I think about all of the different varieties of "people standing still". The concept develops the idea into more.

People standing still. Are they brooding? Are they sulking? Are they enjoying a moment of peace? Are they witnessing something? Are they gazing at a tree or a sunset? Maybe they are trying to remember something. Maybe they are trying to solve a puzzle. Perhaps they are paralyzed. Perhaps they are confused.

Are they practising Zazen? Or are they merely tired?

It could be that they are waiting for something to occur. Or for someone to arrive?

All of these thoughts develop the idea into all of the directions in which it might go.

The idea becomes a concept. But is it visual or verbal or musical or sound related?

Are we talking about a story with a beginning, a middle and an end or are we talking about an abstract structure of forms which contain a million potential stories within a block of stone or a piece of metal?

If it is to be words then should the words be coherent sentences which clearly say a specific thing? Or should the words be sequences of nouns and adjectives without any sentence structure? Is this concept best suited to a stream of consciousness or a technical manual or a blood and thunder whodunit?

If it is to be audio based then what sort of sounds would be suitable? Musical sounds? Or non-musical ones?

If it is to be visual images how many should there be? A single painting which shows the viewer everything which they need to know about the object? Or a sequence of images? A diptych? A triptych? A whole exhibition? A video installation piece? A graphic novel? A movie? A TV series?

If the concept seems best suited to a sculptural form then what would be the most appropriate physical material?

This is how I work. This is my process. It's like a flow chart starting from the original idea and then making a series of choices . The starting point is always idea-into-concept. I don't usually start with the medium of expression. That choice comes later (although the decision is often made very quickly for most things).

I woke up today with the idea of making something which is about my process. That idea rapidly developed over breakfast into a concept and there was a second idea, about people standing still, which became incorporated into the first idea.

Very quickly I had decided that the best format, initially, should be a piece of writing. Later I may develop the idea further into other mediums. In my mind's eye I can see ideas for possible paintings, drawings, CGI etc.

Seen from the outside my process might appear like a Jack of All Trades but, from the inside, it is centred in one place. The development of the idea into the concept.

Coming from a fine art background I think of every type of creative work as a possible way of encapsulating an idea. I ask myself serious questions about the form the work should take. I have not only a method but also a methodology, a self motivated questioning of the method at every step of the way.

My idea of excellence in any medium is the artist who deconstructs their craft at the same time as practising that craft. Examples include: Picasso, David Bowie, Alan Moore, Charlie Brooker, Stewart Lee.